United Nations

Daily Highlights

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WEDNESDAY HIGHLIGHTS

+ Secretary-General to leave Headquarters tonight for Geneva; to chair meeting of Group of High-level Personalities on African Development on 28 December and preparatory meeting for Conference on National Reconciliation in Somalia on 4 January.

+ General Assembly suspends work for forty-seventh session; hears statement by Assembly President saying crisis in Somalia offers evidence that Assembly is "both obliged and prepared to respond to such appeals".

+ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees appeals to Bangladesh Prime Minister to halt coerced return of Myanmar refugees to their homeland; expresses concern about violence in refugee camps on border.

+ Croatia protests letter from Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro) which names Croatia as aggressor in Bosnia and Herzegovina, saying that assertion is "blatantly false".

+ General Assembly's Fifth Committee recommends $2.4 billion appropriation for 1992-1993 biennium -- increase of $78 million over last year's appropriation for period; cost of peace-keeping is put at $109 million.

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali will leave Headquarters tonight for Geneva, according to his Spokesman, who told correspondents today that his stay in Geneva through 27 December will be private.

On 28 December, the Secretary-General will chair a meeting of the Group of High-level Personalities on African Development. Also that day, individual meetings have been scheduled between the Secretary-General, the Co-Chairmen of the International Conference on Former Yugoslavia, Cyrus Vance and Lord Owen, and President Cosic of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro), President Itzebegovic of Bosnia and Herzegovina and President Tudjman of Croatia.

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On 4 January, the Secretary-General would chair the preparatory meeting for the convening of a Conference on National Reconciliation in Somalia. The Secretary-General would then travel to Germany on an official visit from 11 to 12 January, and to France on 13 January for the Chemical Weapons Treaty signing in Paris.

The Secretary-General was expected back in New York around 15 or 16 January, the spokesman said.

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In a statement marking the end of the main part of the forty-seventh session of the General Assembly, the President, Stoyan Ganev, said that the Assembly had adopted 270 resolutions on major problems confronting the world, among them texts on convening an international conference on Somalia and the undertaking of specific actions regarding Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The crisis in Somalia offered evidence that the Assembly was "both obliged and prepared to respond to such appeals". One of the more significant implications of the post-cold war geopolitical realignment was "an increased practical role for the General Assembly in world activities", the Assembly President said.

An other area on which the forty-seventh session of the Assembly had rightly focused its attention was the report of the Secretary-General, "An Agenda for Peace", which, Mr. Ganev said, was serving as a blueprint for the future structuring and activities of the United Nations. A strong consensus now existed to act on many of the issues which that report had singled out as facing the Organization.

Endorsing the "Agenda 21" recommendations on arrangements to follow up the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), the General Assembly yesterday requested the Economic and Social Council to establish a high-level Commission on Sustainable Development. The Assembly recommended that the Commission consist of representatives of 53 States elected by the Council for three-year terms; that it meet once a year for a period of two to three weeks beginning next year, and that its secretariat be located in New York.

By an other resolution, the Assembly urged creditor countries, private banks and multilateral financial institutions to extend new financial support to developing countries, particularly those low-income countries with substantial debt burdens which continue, at great cost, to service their debt and meet their international obligations.

Amongst other actions related to the Conference on Environment and Development, the Assembly moved to establish an international convention to combat desertification, decided to convene the first global conference on the sustainable development of small island developing States, and declared 22 March of each year as World Day for Water.

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It also endorsed the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, Agenda 21 and the Authoritative Statement of Principles for a Global Consensus on the Management, Conservation and Sustainable Development of All Types of Forests, all of which were adopted by the Rio Conference.

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United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Sadako Ogata, today appealed to Bangladesh Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia to take all necessary measures to halt the coerced return of Myanmar refugees to their homeland.

According to a statement issued by UNHCR, the Bangladesh Government, which has extended asylum to some 250,000 refugees from Myanmar, has pledged its strict adherence to the principle of voluntary repatriation. However, UNHCR says it has been prevented from conducting private interviews to ascertain whether those returning are indeed doing so voluntarily. In past weeks, it has witnessed the involuntary repatriation of Myanmar refugees -- incidents that have been confirmed by other, independent sources as well. More than 4,000 people have reportedly returned to Myanmar from Bangladesh.

The UNHCR says it has been denied free and unhindered access to the refugee camps and is therefore unable to carry out its protection mandate or effectively monitor the relief programme. It has been holding intensive negotiations with senior Bangladesh Government officials in an effort to ensure that minimum international standards of protection are applied, but the Bangladesh Government has so far been unwilling to change the existing practices.

High Commissioner Ogata expresses her deep concern about the deterioration in security in refugee camps on the Bangladesh/Myanmar border, including beatings, violence, demonstrations and other incidents that have resulted in loss of life. She also expresses her determination to do all she can to promote voluntary repatriation and to protect and assist refugees; however, she contends that her role will have to be reassessed if her mandate can not be carried out satisfactorily.

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Croatia has protested a letter from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro) in which Croatia is named as the aggressor in Bosnia and Herzegovina with some 40,000 to 60,000 regular Croatian troops fighting there.

Calling that assertion "blatantly false", Mario Nobilo, Croatian Permanent Representative to the United Nations, says in a letter, dated 17 December, that his country has stationed some of its troops on the border with Bosnia and Herzegovina, from which, he says, Serbian forces have been continuously attacking Croatian cities and towns within Croatia.

He asserts that the ethnic Croatian forces which are fighting against Serbian aggression in the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina consist of

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members of the local Croatian population who have taken up arms in order to protect themselves, their families and their property against Serbian forces.

The letter, which is addressed to the Secretary-General, notes that the "greatest threat" to the Serbian people is not the policies of Croatia, Islamic fundamentalism or the Catholic Church, "but the policies of the Serbian Government and the radical Serbian elements in Croatia and in Bosnia and Herzegovina".
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The General Assembly's Fifth Committee (Budgetary and Administrative) has recommended a $2.4 billion appropriation for the 1992-1993 biennium, an increase of $78 million over the Assembly's previous appropriation for the period. The Committee also recommended that the Assembly increase income estimates for the biennium by $22 million. The recommendations were contained in the draft report on the 1992-1993 programme budget, approved by the Committee yesterday as it completed its work for the 47th session of the General Assembly.

The cost of peace-keeping and special missions was estimated to be $109 million, an increase of $13 million over appropriations the Assembly approved last year. The report also recommended that the Assembly approve expenditures of $14 million for development and international economic cooperation and $40 million for the regular United Nations programme of technical cooperation. Recommended spending on social development and humanitarian affairs would be $14,700,300.

Before approval of the draft, the representatives of the United Kingdom and Japan said it was procedurally unacceptable to present the report to the General Assembly on the day of its consideration, saying that it did not speak well to the seriousness of the work to appropriate millions of dollars on the basis of a document which would not be issued in time for adequate review.

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